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ABSTRACT

This paper critiques multiculturalism from a range of fronts and asks what underlying influence ties together its widespread criticisms. In naming this principal influence, the paper considers what new paths are possible for reinventing the multicultural in composition studies. In addition, and most importantly, it asks what difference could such transformation make in students' and teachers' lives. The paper exposes a "Nation(al) narrative" in multiculturalism with the goal of pursuing an equitable transformative pedagogy in composition-minded classrooms. It contends that, to rewrite this Nation(al) narrative, people can resist its re-inscription, re-production, and consumption in classrooms, and that this can be done by engaging in ethical-interventionist pedagogy and critical cultural inquiry. It recommends exploring difference as competing interests, multiple intersecting margins, and conflict negotiations. Contains 22 references. (NKA)

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Beyond an Epcot Nation: Reinventing the Multicultural for Transformative Pedagogy.

by Melissa Hasbrook

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SESSION OVERVIEW

- Multiculturalism is critiqued from a range of fronts, yet what underlying influence ties together its widespread criticisms?
- In naming this principal influence, what new paths are possible for reinventing the multicultural in composition studies?
- Most importantly, what difference could such transformation make in students' and our own lives?

This presentation exposes a Nation(al) narrative in multiculturalism with the goal of pursuing an equitable transformative pedagogy in composition-minded classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Trumping identity/ Calling trump

"An Epcot Nation..." A material and discursive space that celebrates fixed national re-presentations, reducing cultural experience--and hence human beings--to consumable objects. In this small-world-after-all, we find recruited nationals who work in replicated settings, market souvenirs, and enact stereotyped performances: women weaving rugs and belly-dancing in Marakesh and vendors selling Chinese deco-art. This version of multiculturalism emerged during my research, a symbol that I found shared by Gary Olson, who critiques "an Epcot Center approach" in composition as "a process of recolonization" and as a voyeuristic practice of "cultural and intellectual tourism" (48).

In my analysis, a narrative of the Nation(al) re-inscribes this Epcot Nation, as manifest in multiculturalism's historical development and its partnership with democratic education. These findings justify sociologist Craig Calhoun's claim that "nationalism is all too often the enemy of

democracy rooted in civil society" (404). In the midst of *The War on Terrorism*--or *The War of Words* or for short *The "W" War*, US officials daily misappropriate democracy on a global stage. This construction of a nationalistic identity is based on a notion of freedom that contradicts the US's historically oppressive practices. Calhoun's nearly decade-old prediction ominously echoes: that while national identity

> is unlikely to be an identity which 'trumps' all others..., it is an open question how long this would last if the United States ever came under sever external pressure, or wars were again fought on American soil. Nationalism comes to the fore under a variety of historically specific circumstances—like war... (403)

Transforming an Epcot Nation multiculturalism requires a theoretical and pedagogical resistance to nationalistic constructs of identity. And in order to rewrite this Nation(al) narrative, we can resist its re-inscription, re-production, and consumption in our classrooms, and we can do that by engaging in ethical-interventionist pedagogy and critical cultural inquiry.

UNDERLYING INFLUENCE

A recent advertising campaign for M&Ms candies--*Vote and Be Heard!*--illustrates rainbow-colored characters clothed in signature attire, as they perform nationalized and gendered identities, beckoning to consumers, "Your vote can make a world of difference." With its promise, "The world will get a new color," the campaign makes bedfellows of sexist, racist, and nationalistic stereotypes scripted by liberal-democracy and capitalism. The M&M performance is another example of an Epcot Nation, which resembles education today according to Carlos Alberto Torres, with "the notion of citizen as consumer" (434). An unfortunate but accurate description of many classrooms, as our theory, curriculum, and practice "buy into" a Nation(al)

narrative through the consumption and re-production of liberal-democratic, multicultural tokens. I was quite surprised to encounter this trend, due to *my* assumption of democratic education and multiculturalism as simply reformatory projects. Yet my research confirms that such visions *intended* to transform society through increasing school access, improving academic success, and teaching tolerance continue to mask and maintain inequity.

When John Dewey launched his project of democratic education around the turn of the 20th century, the US was shifting from physical colonial expansion to developing a national citizenry (Mitchell 3). World War I commenced amidst rising anti-immigrant sentiment (Decker; Nowlin) that materialized as the Immigrant Act. *Democracy and Education* was first published in this tumultuous climate, parallel to today's *W War* climate. From my analysis, Dewey proposes education to mediate the individual and society--or Nation, in order to ensure national progress. His vision constructs education as an escape hatch from class status, while developing national identity through improving "group habits" (79). An important basis for relationships is maintaining harmony for the sake of unity. Dewey advocates averting the danger of difference (9), and hence his proposal "to secure social changes without introducing disorder" (99).

From cultural pluralism in the 1940s to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 70s, activists and educators appropriated democratic education to address inequities based on racial and gender discrimination, and hence its partnership with multiculturalism. Some ground has been gained in curriculum and institutions. In part, such gains are reflected in skeptics' rejection of multiculturalism as a dangerous and so-called destructive influence on citizens. Yet the conciliatory outcome of securing social rather than political rights has re-inscribed a Nation(al) narrative. Calhoun and Native American Studies scholar LeBeau suggest that cultural difference is reduced to a matter of individual personality, producing consumable entities. And in many

cases, a Deweyian framework is employed--a liberal-democratic discounting of difference practiced in classrooms.

What's missing in current scholarship is recognition of a Nation(al) narrative *within* multicultural advocates' own work and its detriment to equity. Two extensive reviews on multiculturalism demonstrate this performance: Hoffman distinguishes "American" from "other cultural contexts" while appealing to the context of "cross-cultural" (560). Sleeter claims that issues in multiculturalism fail "to cross national borders cleanly enough" (81) for her review, while criticizing British antiracist scholars for ignoring work by US scholars of color (90). Both perform a Nation(al) narrative, as Sleeter intentionally imposes nationalistic limitations and Hoffman implicitly acts out an inscribed Nation(al) narrative.

NEW PATHS

Torres argues that *transnationalization* requires revising our notions of Nation (428), as globalization "blurs national boundaries" (434). Katharyne Mitchell's research attributes inflexibility in education to reinvent itself amidst transcultural relationships as a consequence of multiculturalism's nationalistic agenda (15). Canadian educators met with Hong-Kong immigrant parents who challenged particular practices, including hands-on activities and minimal homework. Privileging such practices as "multicultural" on the premise of respecting individuality (12), educators weren't willing and/or able to resolve the conflict by constructing a compromise. And today's *W War* calls upon this Nation(al) narrative, fostering an inability and unwillingness for dialogue and participatory decision-making. For the sake of people, such as our colleagues, students, and neighbors--relatives and friends--who are caught in this *War of Words*--Arab and Muslim Americans, persons resembling recurring stereotyped images in the

media--we must break the silence, as Dr. King did, to resist the hegemonic partnership of militarism, poverty, and racism. We need to respond to Charles Bazerman's observation and challenge posted recently on a professional listerv:

> I have been waiting for comment on this rhetorical list for observations on this remarkable period of public rhetoric, and every day I am surprised to see nothing. Words alone, domestic and international, have kept the terrors of war in check . . . The nation is in crisis and we need good words, spoken well, by good people.

* * *

The Trans

"The Trans"... a material and discursive space of possibility. A symbol and a site not over-determined by a continually constructed and resisted Nation(al) narrative, but a space in which exclusive margins disrupt--like race *or* class *or* gender. According to Basch *et al*, *The Trans* plays out through "multi-stranded social relations" that "extend across international borders" (qtd. Mitchell 16).

Homi Bhabha theorizes this site of possibility in a range of ways. He describes the *Third Space* as "...the 'inter'--the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space--that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (*Location* 37). This space is performed through *minority discourse*: "a contentious performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life" (157). In the Third Space, through minority discourse, *splitting* occurs--a conflict emerging from a "double movement" (*Location* 145), a simultaneous demand for a "narrative of traditionalism" (35) and a "negation" of the new (37). Bhabha identifies splitting as the contradictory performance of a Nation(al) narrative (47), as competing interests emerge *between* parties and *within* their own identities and experiences

(Olson and Wolfram 381). He refers overall to this experience or event as *hybridization*--a negotiation that's prompted by inequity rather than merely the presence or existence of various cultures (Olson and Wolfram 378). It's "about how you negotiate between texts or cultures or practices in a situation of power imbalances in order to be able to see the way in which strategies of appropriation, revision, and iteration can produce [equitable] possibilities" (390). As Bhabha and Clifford Geertz envision, *The Trans* isn't a conflation or binary of the local and the global--or the national and the transnational--but rather a constitution of their conflicting partiality, performed in a situated context amidst relations *within* and *extending beyond* a local or national site. Symbolically and situationally, *The Trans* exposes M&M's *Vote and Be Heard!* campaign as the Nation(al) narrative's re-inscription, performed through the commodification of culture and the production of an Epcot Nation.

Critical Cultural Inquiry

A starting point in education or the classroom, according to Green and Pearlman, to move "away from notions of nationalism" (18) is to analyze the crisis as "not just the result of a gap in knowledge but gaps in culture and how people learn... [,] on differences in viewpoint, how that viewpoint is communicated and how people interact" (22). A critical cultural inquiry then engages the significance of meaning-making (constructions), perceptions of meaning, and revising meaning. Sonia Nieto has shaped a flexible framework to address such areas. Most relevant to resisting a Nation(al) narrative is a revisionary multiculturalism that focuses our attention upon epistemology, ideology, pedagogy, and discourse, as described by Nieto: "challeng[ing] hegemonic knowledge" (206), "complicat[ing] pedagogy" (207), and "encourag[ing] 'dangerous discourses'" (209). Identifying strategies to enact this kind of

pedagogy, Keith Gilyard calls compositionists to pursue "a more perfect democracy" (266) with students: "to interrogate and resist discourses", "to comprehend as completely as possible how discourse operates", and "to engage in discussions of culture, ideology, hegemony, and asymmetrical power relations" (266).

Any change to our classrooms means that specifics vary, depending on our students, institutions, pedagogies, and current cultural context. With this in mind, I find it relevant to disclose my specifics, which have impacted my research: I've been in graduate school since 1999 in Linguistics, English, and finally Rhetoric & Writing. The majority of my teaching experience has taken place at a land-grant university with mostly white-middle-class students. My courses have ranged from requirements with assigned curriculum and grading to autonomous electives. I also work at an urban community college with mostly nontraditional students, including working-class, older persons, immigrants, and refugees. Paulo Freire's work contributes the greatest inspiration to my pedagogy and research. While teaching in the humanities, education, and English with a comp-minded approach, most of my courses have existed within an institutional climate requiring a diversity curriculum, which lends itself potentially--although not definitely--to such inquiry. Curriculum plays an important but not almighty role, as I've found that my pedagogy limits and makes possible an inquiry that contributes to equitable aims.

Since 9.11 occurred during my studies and has been shaping my identity as a teacher, I'm challenged by a continual need to address the Nation(al) narrative in its daily recapitulation. I'm compelled to reinvent my pedagogy to examine *The W War*'s impact on employment, education, and civil rights and liberties. As I attempt to facilitate critical cultural inquiry in *Trans* sites, I examine the rhetorical and relational along the lines that Gilyard, Nieto, and Green and Pearlman describe. My courses interrogate the cultural assumptions and interactions of its participants.

Currently, my rhetorical strategy is inquiry projects--from oral history to service learning, and my relational strategy is reciprocal collaboration--between students, community partners, and myself. Overall, the commonalities between these course contexts have been (1) developing reciprocal relationships through collaborative inquiry, (2) prompting and implementing feedback from students for on-going revisions in the classroom, and (3) negotiating conflict. And in my handout I offer descriptions of what these rhetorical and relational strategies have looked like in various courses I've taught.

Courses:	*Rhetorical:* Inquiry projects	*Relational:* Collaboration
Humanities requirement	Oral history: Overall topic on "American identity"; self-selected interviewee & topic (i.e. women, religious persons).	Team-based inquiry projects: assignments requiring input & interaction of all group members; teacher-team meetings. Student feedback: mid & end-term evaluations, Q&A times.
Elective writing course	(Mini) Ethnography: Use of radical lenses (i.e. feminist, postcolonial) to re-view familiar spaces (i.e. home, work).	
Teacher education requirement	Phenomenology: Interviewing participants connected with K-12 youth (i.e. parents, teachers, community workers). Service Learning: Serving library staff and patrons through programs.	After Class Research Group: Volunteer students who provide critiques and suggestions about the course.

DIFFERENCE TO MAKE

As we reinvent the multicultural in our classrooms, we should be aware of its legacy. It is a legacy in which equitable gains are based on translating "people of color" into "subnations" for their access to "sit at our table", according to Bhabha (Olson and Wolfram 380). The legacy exposes a Nation(al) narrative's re-inscription by adding new colors--whether in the context of races, genders, sexualities, etc., and verifies our need to critically inquiry culture as a *Trans*-site.

I suggest transformation along two lines. One, rather than tourists and vendors of an Epcot Nation who buy and sell liberal-democratic multicultural tokens, we need to explore difference as competing interests, multiple intersecting margins, and conflict negotiations. Torres explains that resisting the historical pattern of pluralism that operates on unified notions of culture means engaging the conditions of "human existence" (435), which are our "multi-stranded social relations" (qtd. Basch *et al* in Mitchell).

Two, the popular notion of the contact zone needs a dose of ethical pedagogy, according to Gary Olson, to push compositionists beyond the unity-harmony of "liberal pluralism" (47) that avoids "issues of conflict" (48). Like Ajay Heble, Timothy Barnett, and others, we must be willing to confront discrimination as it surfaces in our classrooms. Resisting a Nation(al) narrative that focuses upon sameness out of a fear of difference or conflict, we should heed Heble's recommendation to do away with "doing diverse literature" (154), and instead envision and enact ethical-interventionist pedagogy as Olson describes--"the encounter with the Other" (46). And with *The W War* in full swing, I encounter such moments of conflict in my classroom and on both of my campuses--in the library copy center, on bathroom stall walls, and conversations with colleagues--each serving as opportunities to critically inquire culture.

Unmasking celebratory versions of multiculturalism as a celebration of the Nation(al) with a democratic guise is a necessary step for transforming intentional and blind nationalism. Rather than avoiding potential conflicts stemming from the reality of globalization and re-inscribing singular static notions of Culture and the Citizen, rhetorical and relational strategies can overcome this Nation(al) narrative. To explore difference and enact an ethical-interventionist pedagogy, we need to develop a practice that Ellen Cushman and Terese Monberg coin as *social reflexivity*--a relentless re-interpretation of one's perceptions, decision-making

process, and actions that makes possible constructing and re-constructing equitable relationships. Jennifer Trainor's recent *Cs* paper reminds critical pedagogues to examine assumptions of "ethical agency" (636), which often leads to dismissing students who resist our self-proclaimed social justice visions. Scholars provide us with particular ways to practice social reflexivity: Freire calls our attention to oppressive "false generosity" that fails to respect people's humanity, Bhabha challenges an idealized pedagogy that fosters re-inscription of a Nation(al) narrative, and Judith Butler challenges the assumption that resistant performance guarantees equity. As we engage in social-reflexivity to construct equitable relationships, our pedagogy can enact what Freire describes as "relentless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry," an inquiry that can transform nationalized and commodified multiculturalism into a critical and flexible framework for social-justice.

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